

**Subject: RE: [Patrin] 138/01/n Prague/London - airport case - application  
launched at E**

**Date:** Mon, 29 Oct 2001 11:04:55 +0100

**From:** Claude Cahn <ccahn@errc.org>

**Reply-To:** patrin-roma-culture@igc.topica.com

**To:** Markus Pape <markus.pape@ecn.cz>,

Patrin <patrin-roma-culture@igc.topica.com>

**References:** 1

- > Liberty takes Home Secretary to court over treatment of Romas
- > UK Immigration actions at Prague Airport:
- > "discriminating, humiliating and unlawful"
- > Wednesday 24th October 2001
- > >
- > Liberty has this afternoon served papers on the Home Secretary,
- > as we launch our application for judicial review on behalf of the
- > European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and six anonymous Czech
- > Roma people.
- > >
- > The Roma people were subjected to discriminatory, humiliating and
- > unlawful treatment by UK Immigration Service Officers at Prague
- > Airport in July of this year. The officers were there as part of a
- > special arrangement with the Czech Government allowing British
- > immigration officials to turn back passengers before they even
- > reached the plane to travel to Britain.
- > >
- > Liberty's in-house counsel Shami Chakrabarti, the lawyer for this
- > case, says:
- > "People at Prague airport were being kept off the plane purely by
- > reference to the colour of their skin. It's a mechanism to turn
- > people away automatically, without having even to listen to the
- > story of people who are highly likely to have a valid claim for
- > asylum.
- > >
- > "We believe this is a racist practice, which doesn't reflect the
- > Government's justifications for the Immigration exemptions from the
- > Race Relations Amendment Act".
- > >
- > The people automatically turned away are not from groups who are
- > unlikely to be fleeing persecution - rather, they are among those
- > more likely to have a legitimate reason to request asylum. That's

> because an authorisation signed by Home Office Minister Barbara  
> Roche specifies seven ethnic or national groups whom immigration  
> officers are empowered to refuse entry to the UK outright on the  
> basis of their race or nationality.  
> These include:  
>>  
> \* Afghans - although Britain is now at war with the Taliban regime  
> and has denounced its extensive abuses committed against  
> Afghan people;  
> \* Kurds (despite Iraq), Tamils (despite the ongoing civil war in Sri  
> Lanka), Somalis (despite over a decade of complete lawlessness  
> and state breakdown - the Foreign office lists it as one of just eight  
> countries in the world to which it advises against all travel);  
> \*  
> \* ... and Roma. In a letter to the Guardian this summer, the  
> highly-respected Medical Foundation for Care of the Victims of  
> Torture stated that it had treated 59 Czech Roma in the last five  
> years alone at its centre for survivors of torture and violence. The  
> Foundation noted  
> "numerous testimonies of official complicity, that at best describe  
> indifference by the authorities to these attacks and at worst  
> highlight their participation in anti-Roma violence, including the rape  
> of Roma women. This evidence seems to count for little with the  
> Home Office".

>>  
>>  
>>

#### > BACKGROUND

> Our six clients in this case all went to Prague Airport to catch  
> flights to London in the course of July.  
>>  
> \* All had valid airline tickets.  
> \* All are Czech nationals - and so don't need a visa for travel to  
> the UK  
> \* Yet all were singled out for extended questioning apparently by  
> reference to the colour of their skin. They were prevented from  
> travelling to the UK. The procedure was conducted in full view of  
> attendant media and other passengers.  
> \* Some but not all were seeking asylum; one elderly woman was  
> seeking a short visit with her grand-daughter in the UK.  
>>

- > The Immigration Service may have been relying on a "ministerial
- > authorisation" signed in April 2001 by Home Office minister
- > Barbara Roche under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2001.
- > This document appears to allow people to be refused entry to the
- > UK by reason of their race.
- > >
- > The above-mentioned practice is contrary to general principles of
- > English law and to the Human Rights Act.
- > >
- > We shall be seeking an end to this degrading practice at Prague
- > Airport and the withdrawal of the ministerial authorisation.
- > >
- > Issued by Roger Bingham - press officer, Liberty; telephone 020
- > 7378 3656
- > [www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk](http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk)
- > >
- >

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**Claude Cahn** <[ccahn@errc.org](mailto:ccahn@errc.org)>

Research and Publications Director  
European Roma Rights Center

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